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LIVELY JOURNALISM.

BY MAX O'RELL.

SPEAK of electric light, of phonographs and graphophones, if you like ; speak of those thousand and one inventions which have come out of the American brain ; but if you wish to mention the greatest and most wonderful achievement of American activity, do not hesitate for a moment to give the palm to American journalism : it is simply the *nec plus ultra*.

You will find some people, I admit, who condemn its loud tone ; others who object to its meddling with private life ; others, again, who have something to say of its contempt for statements which are in perfect accordance with strict truth. I even believe that a French writer, whom I do not wish to name, once said that very few statements to be found in an American paper were to be relied upon—beyond the date. People may say this and may say that about American journalism ; I confess that I like it, simply because it will supply you with twelve—on Sundays with thirty—pages that are readable from the first line to the last. Yes, from the first line to the last, including the advertisements.

The American journalist may be a man of letters, but, above all, he must possess a bright and graphic pen, and his services are not required if he cannot write a racy article or paragraph out of the most trifling incident. He must relate facts if he can, but if he cannot, so much the worse for the facts ; he must be entertaining and turn out something that is readable.

Suppose, for example, a reporter has to send to his paper the account of a police-court proceeding. There is nothing more important to bring to the office than the case of a servant girl who has robbed her mistress of a pair of diamond earrings. The English reporter will bring his editor something in the following style :

“ Mary Jane Smith was yesterday charged before Mr. So-and-So with stealing a pair of diamond earrings from her mistress. It

appears that, last Monday, as Mrs. N. went to her room to dress for dinner, she missed a pair of diamond earrings, which she usually kept in a little drawer in her bedroom. On questioning her maid on the subject, she received incoherent answers ; suspicion that the maid was the thief arose in her mind, and . . .,” and half a column in this dry style will be published in the *Times*, the *Standard*, the *Daily News*, or any other London morning paper.

Now, the American reporter will be required to bring something a little more entertaining if he hopes to be worth his salt on the staff of his paper, and he will probably get up an account like this :

“ Mary Jane Smith is a pretty little brunette of some twenty summers. On looking in the glass at her dainty little ears, she fancied how lovely a pair of diamond earrings would look in them. So one day she thought she would try on those of her mistress. How lovely she looked ! said the looking-glass, and the Mephistopheles that is hidden in the corner of every man’s or woman’s breast soon suggested that she should keep them, . . .,” etc., etc., and the whole will read like a little story, probably entitled something like, “ Another Gretchen gone wrong through the love of jewels.”

The heading has to be thought of no less than the paragraph. Not a line is to be dull in a paper sparkling all over with eye-ticklers of all sorts. Oh ! those delicious headings that would resuscitate the most dead of the dead and make them sit up in their graves !

A short time ago a man named Smith was bitten by a rattlesnake and treated with whiskey at a New York hospital. An English paper would have just mentioned the fact, and have the paragraph headed, “ A man cured of a rattlesnake bite by whiskey ” ; but a kind correspondent sends me the headings of this bit of intelligence in five New York papers. They are as follows :

1. Smith is all right !
2. Whiskey does it !
3. The snake routed at all points !
4. The reptile is nowhere !
5. Drunk for three days !!

Let a batch of officials be dismissed ; do not suppose that an American editor will accept the news with such a heading as

“Dismissal of officials.” The reporter will have to bring some labels that will fetch the attention. “Massacre at the Custom-House” or “So many heads in the baskets!” will do. Now, I maintain that it requires a wonderful imagination, something little short of genius, to be able, every day, to hit on a hundred of such headings. But the American journalist does it.

An American paper is a huge collection of short stories. The Sunday edition of the *New York World*, the *New York Herald*, the *Chicago Herald*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Boston Herald*, the *Boston Globe*, and many others, is something like ten volumes of miscellaneous literature, and I do not know of any achievement to be compared to it.

The steamer that brought me to America a few weeks ago, when some hundred miles from Sandy Hook, was boarded by the pilot, who brought the *New York* papers with him. After being dead to the world for nearly a fortnight, we passengers pounced upon them. The first item that caught my eye was headed, “Mrs. Nash takes her time over it.” It appears that a fortnight before Mrs. Nash had had a baby, that a week later she had presented her husband with a second, and that the day before a third had come into the world. Now, I am ready to admit that in France and in England, where things are done in the old-fashion ways, Mrs. Nash would have taken only one day to present Mr. Nash with this numerous family; but what is the use of coming to America if it is to see things done as they are in the Old World? “Mrs. Nash takes her time over it!” How candid! how lovely! how good-humored! High time for Mr. Nash to put a stop to it, I should say.

I cannot do better than to compare an American paper to a store where the goods, the articles, are labelled so as to immediately strike the customer. A few weeks ago I heard my friend, Colonel Charles H. Taylor, editor of that very successful paper the *Boston Globe*, give an interesting address on journalism before the members of the New England Club, of Boston. He maintained that the proprietor of a newspaper had as much right to make his shop-window attractive to the public as any tradesman. If the Colonel is of opinion that journalism is a trade and the journalist a mere tradesman, I agree with him. If journalism is not to rank among the highest and noblest of professions, and is to be nothing but a commercial enterprise, I agree with him.

Now, is journalism a commercial enterprise? Well, I cannot help thinking that it is, especially in a democracy. The people of a democracy like America are educated in politics. They think for themselves, and care but little for the opinions of such and such a journalist on any question of public interest. They want news, not literary essays on news. When I hear some Americans say that they object to their journalism, I answer that journalists are like other people who supply the public: they keep the article that is wanted.

A free country possesses the government it deserves, and the journalism that it wants. And a people active and busy as the Americans are want a journalism that will keep their interest awake and amuse them—and they get it. The average American, for example, cares not a pin for what his representatives say or do in Washington, but he likes to be acquainted with what is going on in Europe, and that is why the American journalist will give him a far more detailed account of what is going on in the Palace of Westminster than of what is being said in the Capitol.

In France journalism is personal. On any great question of the day, domestic or foreign, the Frenchman will want to read the opinion of John Lemoine in the *Journal des Débats*, or the opinion of Edward Lockroy, or may be that of Henry Rochefort. Every Frenchman is led by the editor of the newspaper he patronizes. But the Frenchman is only a democrat in name, and France has made the mistake of establishing a republic before she made republicans of her sons. A French journalist signs his articles and is a leader of public opinion. Every successful journalist has a chance to be elected a representative of the people.

In America, or in England, the journalist has no personality outside the literary classes. A leading article in an English or American paper will attract no public notice. It will only be quoted on the European continent. It is the monthly and the weekly papers or magazines that now play the part of the dailies of bygone days. An article in the London *Spectator* or *Saturday Review*, or in one of the great American monthly magazines, will be quoted all over the land, and I believe that this relatively new journalism has now forever taken the place of the old one. In a country where everybody reads, men as well as women; in a country where nobody takes any interest in politics outside of the State in

which he lives, the journalist has to turn out every day all the news he can gather in the most readable form. Formerly journalism was a branch of literature ; now it is a news store ; and is so not only in America. The English press shows signs of the same tendency, and so do the Parisian papers. Take the London *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Star*, and the Paris *Figaro*, as illustrations of what I advance. And as democracy makes progress in England, journalism will become more and more American, although the English reporter will have some trouble in trying to compete with his American *confrère* in humor and liveliness. Under the guidance of political leaders, the newspapers of continental Europe direct public opinion ; in a democracy the newspapers follow public opinion and cater to the public taste : they are the servants of the people. The American says to his journalists : " I don't care a pin for your opinion on such a question. Give me the news and I will comment on it myself. Only don't forget that I have to do fourteen hours' work to-day and that I want to be amused."

So, as I have said elsewhere, the American journalist must be spicy, lively, and bright. He must know how not merely to report, but to relate in a racy, catching style, an accident, a trial, a conflagration, and be able to make up an article of one or two columns upon the most insignificant incident. He must be interesting, readable. His eyes and ears must be always open every one of his five senses on the alert, for he must keep ahead in this wild race for news. He must be a good conversationalist on most subjects, so as to bring back from his interviews with different people a good store of materials. He must be a man of courage, to brave rebuffs. He must be a philosopher, to pocket abuse. He must be a man of honor, and I have always found him so. Whenever I have begged an American reporter to kindly abstain from mentioning this or that which might have been said in conversation with him, I have invariably found that he kept his word. But if the matter is of public interest, he is, before all and above all, the servant of the public. So, never challenge his spirit of enterprise, or he will leave no stone unturned until he has found your secret and exhibited it in public.

I do not think that American journalism needs an apology. It is the natural outcome of circumstances and the democratic

times we live in. The Théâtre-Français is not now, under a republic, and probably never again will be, what it was when it was placed under the patronage and supervision of the French Court. Democracy is not calculated to foster literature and the fine arts like monarchy, with its court and its fashionable society. Journalism cannot be now what it was when papers were read by people of culture only. In a democracy, the stage and journalism have to please the masses of the people. As the people become better and better educated, the stage and journalism will rise with them.

What the people want is news, and they have it, and journals are properly called "newspapers."

Speaking of American journalism, no man need use apologetic language.

Not when the proprietor of an American paper will not hesitate to spend thousands of dollars to provide his readers with the minutest details about some great European event.

Not when an American paper will, at its own expense, send Mr. Henry M. Stanley to Africa in search of Livingstone.

Not so long as the American press is vigilant, and keeps its thousand eyes open on the interests of the American public.

MAX O'RELL.